



Iowa Smart Planning Draft Recommendations Public Comments Captured at Public Input Meetings

October 13, 2010

The following comments/questions were captured by staff during public input sessions held across the state, as well as a webinar hosted by the Iowa State Association of Counties, concerning the Iowa Smart Planning Task Force's draft recommendations approved on September 15, 2010.

Public Input Sessions were held at the following:

- Sept. 28 – Spencer City Hall, Spencer
- Sept. 29 – County History Center, Red Oak
- Sept. 30 – Waverly Civic Center, Waverly
- Oct. 5 – Public Library, Coralville
- Oct. 6 – Webinar
- Oct. 7 – City Hall Auditorium, Boone

A total of 206 persons attended either one of the public input meetings or the webinar. Attendee numbers below do not include RIO staff, Nichole Warren (IARC), or Task Force members in attendance.

These sessions tended to function more as an educational venue for attendees, rather than an opportunity to provide detailed comments on recommendations. Attendees asked a lot of questions to be sure they understand the concepts being presented.

Spencer – Sept 28, 2010 – 9 attendees

Comments and Questions:

- GIS
 - Need to have discussion about who has access to the GIS data and at what levels.
 - What about funding for GIS effort at the local and regional level?
 - Would it be a requirement for counties to share their existing GIS data?
 - Some areas have parcel data but may want to charge to release it. Areas that don't have parcel data will probably require state funding to acquire it, which could be seen as a problem by those areas that have already invested local resources.
 - A bit of clarification on the "who has access" issue – need to ensure safety and security of GIS data.
 - Would counties be required to share information – "shall" or "may?"
 - Some Iowa counties do not have assessor data available. This information is needed to complete plans, and should be addressed by the State.
 - There are concerns among communities with sharing data. The Task Force should discuss how to handle proprietary information and information that has already been paid for by certain communities. Cost sharing needs to be addressed.
- Watersheds
 - Watershed plans with goals focusing on land use may be drastically different depending on what jurisdiction is writing it (e.g. A tourist town could want to keep a lake for tourism, where a downstream town may be worried about the effects of the lake on flooding and floodplains.) How do we reconcile these differences?
 - The 9 regional watersheds can have drastically different resources that need protection within a large area.

- Rick Hunsaker stated that regional plans are advisory; local governments get to decide their comp plans.
- Qualifying Smart Plans
 - Will the COGs be qualifying plans that they wrote for member governments? How do we rectify this conflict of interest? Should state more clearly that the PAC is made up of representatives from the region, not COG staff. Need to have a mix of representatives. Should consider having P&Z experts/board members from the region on the PAC.
 - Concern that the qualifying process will become rubber-stamping.
 - Was there a discussion about having the local plan qualifying process at the state level?
 - There's a danger of community representatives not approving competing communities' plans.
 - In response to a question about who makes up the committee, Rick said it will "probably be a mix since some areas don't have planners."
 - How does the appeal process work? To the policy board of the COG, or to the state.
 - Planning Advisory Committees should include planning experts, not just elected officials. Need to contain P & Z officials and planning professionals
- Cooperation Between Neighboring Jurisdictions
 - Are cities and counties required to look at each others' plans and work together? How do we make sure this happens?
 - How do we address conflicting visions? Need to talk more about the COGs role in this.
 - Suggest a system where neighboring cities/counties comment on each others' plans during the PAC review.
 - How do we discourage annexation wars?
 - Many communities within a two-mile jurisdiction have very different land use goals for the exact same area, and it may be hard to find agreement.
 - Would regional plans have a land management component? "No, because local governments decide."
 - If that's the case, would there be a separate set of criteria for the regional plan since land use isn't a component? Or maybe it SHOULD remain a component.
 - Steve Hallgren said he had trouble getting anyone in his COG interested in doing a multijurisdictional plan.
 - Regions covering more than one state will need direction on how their regional plans should look and the level of involvement from local governments outside of Iowa.
 - Local governments should not be required to seek direction from adjacent cities when preparing a local plan. Each community has their own planning goals and approaches and communities that they should be able to develop.
- Other
 - Recommend a pilot study (one urban and one rural) to test out the framework.
 - A pilot project should be conducted in 1 or 2 regions which would provide funds for development of a regional plan. This would allow an opportunity for revisions in the process prior to requiring all regions to develop a plan.
 - What about the COGs that lie within other states?
 - What is the Plan B? How do we start doing things now?
 - Do we have Plan B in case the legislature won't fund the proposal?
 - Rick Hunsaker responded:
 - The committee will be in place for three years, through 2012.
 - The importance of regional planning is being recognized so will likely get some legislative attention.
 - Recommendations don't have to be implemented all at once, we can take "baby steps."

- The Warren County plan may be a good model:
http://www.co.warren.ia.us/Zoning/Land_Use_Plan/Pdf_Files/Warren%20County,%20IA%20Final%20Comp%20Plan.pdf
- The recommendations are good, but not likely to be implemented due to funding constraints. Some recommendations could be implemented with existing resources.

Red Oak – Sept 29, 2010 – 9 attendees

- Want to be sure that there is a balance between top down and bottom up decision-making within the recommended framework.
- There appears to be some overlap with the US Dept of Housing and Urban Development's new sustainable communities planning programs.
- Like that the guidance appears to set minimum thresholds rather than setting up a template that all must follow; this allows for greater innovation and creativity at the local and regional levels.
- Larger communities believe they are already doing this work; smaller communities seem to be most concerned about costs (from COG representative).
- Need to be sure that the DNR, IDALS, and other professionals within the water resources field are consulted on determining what is "best for water management."
- May want to add monitoring of watershed applications to OPGIS' responsibilities.
- Good to see that this framework would allow for a collaborative process for addressing issues affecting an entire region.
- Watershed planning is already occurring; there is a lack of necessary people and resources to have a greater effect.
- Concerned about how easily watershed plans can be produced and implemented on a regional scale; the scope might be too large.
- Would want to see the COGs act as a forum for discussing conflicts between neighboring or nearby jurisdictions.
- Need to encourage COG collaboration.
- Would like to see an unified grant application for state funds and clearinghouse for grant opportunities at the state level.

Waverly – Sept 30, 2010 – 17 attendees

- Need to be sure that the personnel needs of OPGIS are filled with qualified persons.
- Need to include a way for determining adverse impact of proposed developments and land use changes.
 - How do we evaluate when an upstream plan negatively impacts downstream plans?
- Because planning mandates will not be popular, need to be sure there are sufficient incentives to get meaningful action.
- Perhaps watershed plans could be developed on a regional scale, with a signature land use component, rather than using COG boundaries.
- The Iowa Smart Planning: Local Comprehensive Planning Grant Program has energized communities; even small carrots help to move the concepts.
 - The grant process (\$1M) has provided an opportunity to educate communities and get them excited about planning
- Need to be sure that COGs are up-to-date on new programs and incentives.
- There were some concerns about what "accessible GIS" system means; there is concern about the costs that have already been accrued to counties and cities that have independently invested in systems, as well as security concerns; also need to be sure there is sufficient technical knowledge within communities and counties to effectively use the information.
- A GIS structure would be very helpful in standardizing GIS data across the state.
- May want to more specifically provide for the applicability of multi-jurisdictional plans.

- Planning is good for sustainable programming.
- Maintaining local control and sustainable funding are important.
- Are regional plans going to speak to local zoning; not likely.
- Do not be too top-heavy or too prescriptive.
- The Task Force should consider emphasizing multi-jurisdictional planning.
 - Multi-jurisdictional planning benefits small communities that may not otherwise do planning
 - Define multi-jurisdictional planning
- Within the proposed toolbox, it would be helpful to have illustrations of good planning outcomes and outcomes resulting from poor planning, as well as information about communities that do plan versus those that don't (population growth, job growth, property values, etc.); may want to put out a call for submissions of good planning examples throughout the state.
- Case scenarios would be helpful; what is the impact of planning
- Include "cautionary tales"
- May want to add greenhouse gas emissions as a benchmark.
- There is a need for greater education on Smart Planning in rural areas.
- Need to review existing zoning code language as this is a primary tool for implementing plans.
- Feedback that the COGs are hearing is positive. Once people understood the principles they realized there are positive attributes to planning
- Include educational component on how long it will take to do watershed planning and implement changes

Coralville – Oct 5, 2010 – 74 attendees

Comments and Questions:

- Watersheds
 - Needs to be more direct focus on mitigation of flash flooding, referencing LIDAR and speeding things up on watershed planning.
 - How does the regional plan fit within the watershed plan?
 - The state needs to have an overlay watershed plan. It can't be piecemeal.
 - How will watershed planning utilize/ have authority over the many existing watershed groups?
- Oversight
 - How widespread is comprehensive planning now? How much work do we have to do?
 - Is there anything that can be done to prevent councils from overruling the smart plan to cater to some development or industry?
 - Is there a requirement for how often local plans should be updated? Should there be?
 - How will oversight of the COGs be provided?
- Politics
 - Is this an unfunded mandate? Need to make that more clear, addressing this specifically so it is not assumed.
 - How insulated is this from the political arena? Is it supported on both sides of the aisle?
 - Concerned about this framework working in the political realities of regional planning. Need to have effective carrots.
- Funding/Cost
 - Was there discussion about using federal funding?
 - Has there been an estimate on what this would cost (i.e. staffing the offices, establishing the GIS system, creating the watershed plans, etc.)? This should be included in the recommendations.
- GIS
 - Is the proposed GIS system both a repository and a server? What is the cost?

- Independent Planning Office
 - We need to not make the same mistake that we did with the previous planning office by rolling it into another agency and having it die.
- Regional and Local Plans
 - Do the local governments have to meet the benchmarks to receive funding?
 - It seems as if the recommendations put more responsibility on the COGs. Where does the expertise that exists in many of our cities and counties come into play?
 - There is a lot of focus on floods. Are there other specific best practices mentioned in the recommendations? Other important issues should be mentioned/required of smart plans.
 - Will there be different requirements for urban versus rural?
 - What is the definition of regional planning?
 - Schools need to be considered too. They are a huge factor in sprawl. They should be included in both the state level strategic planning and in regional and local plans.
 - Would local smart plans have to fit within the regional plans? What about if a local plan is developed first?
- Other
 - How does the state expect to do meaningful comprehensive planning when agriculture (specifically CAFOs) is exempt? This needs to be addressed!
 - It would be helpful if the recommendations had a proposed timeline/progression of how all of this planning would occur.
- How widespread is comprehensive planning in Iowa? How many cities and counties are currently doing comprehensive planning?
- Is this an unfunded mandate? It appears that the costs all come back on local government. There should be some state carrot other than allowing for tax increases.
- How do you do comprehensive planning in the state when land uses like animal factories are excluded from zoning?
- It would be good to require that local comprehensive plans be updated every “x” number of years.
- Under recommendation #2, what does regional smart planning mean? Regions for COGs are not the same as watersheds.
- Would encourage the recommendation to do more to mitigate flash flooding. Dry Creek in Palo could be a demonstration project.
- What is there in this recommendation that ensures that elected officials will follow the plans and not give in to any developers who come to town?
- Does this have bi-partisan support? Is it insulated from politics?
- Have you thought about funding options under worst-case scenarios? Will federal funding be available for implementation?
- Have you estimated what it will cost to staff an office?
- How will local comprehensive plans fit into regional plans?
- Does regional mean the RPA or multiple counties?
- What happens if they are unable to meet benchmarks is funding removed?
- It looks like COGs are being asked to do a lot more; there isn’t enough focus on how to bolster resources and expertise.
- How can resources from larger cities and counties be pulled in to help?
- The bottom line to mitigate flooding is to not build in floodplains.
- How will this office balance the work of the COGS?
- This is admirable but realistically how do you think you can get the region to work on watershed issues. They aren’t going to do it without incentives.
- How do you define regional planning?
- Are the GIS going to be both a repository and a server?

- We need to establish a culture of planning in this state, not just focused on flooding.
- Which comes first, local or regional planning?
- In recommendation 1.1, why did you not suggest where this office should be located? In recommendation 3.2 you really do not need to start over from scratch for developing a toolbox, use the resources that are already available, recognize that with smart planning you are not looking at universal design to allow aging in place. Housing diversity is not the same as universal design. Should build to accommodate all persons.
- What about school district planning?
- Iowa had a GIS office, are you familiar with the history of what happened?
- How are watershed plans and regional plans going to fit together?
- There should be a overlay watershed plan.
- Are you going to prepare a timeline to explain what happens first? It would be helpful to have a progression to better understand.

Webinar – Oct 6, 2010 – 71 attendees

QUESTION/COMMENT: Has there been the necessary discussion for GIS data sharing across County/C boundaries, primarily focused standards?

QUESTION/COMMENT: Why weren't the Big Sioux, Little Sioux, and Missouri River not included? Is there a reason no members on the RIO taskforce are from communities west of Mason City?

QUESTION/COMMENT: Will the RIO task force meetings on Oct 20 and Nov 10 be open to the public?

QUESTION/COMMENT: What steps have been taken to solicit input? We feel that little time / effort was given for input. Especially in Western Iowa?

QUESTION/COMMENT: Have any large Iowa cities used COGs to develop their land use plans? What role would they play with large communities that hire consultants?

QUESTION/COMMENT: Excuse me if this has already been asked, but how is this proposed state legislation going to meld with already existing federal regulation? It seems like this might be duplicative at the state level.

QUESTION/COMMENT: It seems like this is very similar to the sustainability planning regulations from HUD.

QUESTION/COMMENT: Recommendation 2 discusses in requirements for regional plans that they must include the 13 elements. The legislation used "shall consider and may include" why the difference

QUESTION/COMMENT: Will there be any training for COGs in how to incorporate Smart Planning into current Comp. plans formatting?

QUESTION/COMMENT: We are starting to write comp. plans using Smart Planning Principles, is that recommended?

QUESTION/COMMENT: You stated that the process described in recommendation 1.4 is being done to some degree by the COGs already. How so?

QUESTION/COMMENT: Do you have any concerns that you will be able to adequately address public comment within the month that you have to do so?

QUESTION/COMMENT: If Iowa is requiring a regional plan for our bi-state region to include out of Iowa counties, will Iowa also be 100% funding the planning efforts for the out of state counties?

QUESTION/COMMENT: Could you give a better explanation of a PAC. How many members, where do they come from - citizens, elected officials, local govt. staff, etc. Will there be instruction for PAC members?

QUESTION/COMMENT: We are a bi-state COG. Would we create a Regional Plan for only the Iowa portion of our region?

QUESTION/COMMENT: This is Larry Nagle. You discussed possible funding sources. Is the entire process dependent upon locating funding. In other words. Does this effort stop if the legislature not provide a funding source for example for the GIS office?

QUESTION/COMMENT: Followup: While Smart Growth efforts will continue without funding a GIS office will not be created, right? I'm not trying to throw sand in the gears, just curious.

QUESTION/COMMENT: Will there be sample plans, goals and objectives available for cities, counties and regions to use to develop local plans and ordinances? When will these tools be available?

QUESTION/COMMENT: IF Smart Growth is economically sustainable, then why do we need a new funding source vs. diverting existing public funding at all levels to invest in this future vision?

QUESTION/COMMENT: What does the general public feel about Smart Planning in their backyards? We here buzz locally about it, but don't get the NIMBY's to allow much of it when it has to do with higher density, mixed use, etc.

QUESTION/COMMENT: Can we get a copy of the presentation?

QUESTION/COMMENT: what if our county is not part of a cog

QUESTION/COMMENT: If Marion County is in the process of getting ready to update the comp plan should we wait until more is done with Iowa Smart Planning

QUESTION/COMMENT: Will there be training for counties updating comp plans

Boone – Oct 7, 2010 – 26 attendees

- Define a COG
- Did the task force discuss complications to forming a COG in central Iowa?
- How much will it cost for regional plans to be developed?
 - How much will a levee be to cover costs?
- At least nine of the recommendations require funding. Will the task force prioritize the recommendations?
- At least two dozen states in the country have similar legislation but it is mandated and regional plans are mandated. Mandated regional plans make a lot of sense for Iowa as well as incentives for local planning. Watershed planning is also very important.
- Different size communities have different concerns. Do all communities have to apply the principles?
- How would this impact inspections and zoning? Will this lead to statewide building code requirements?
- PAC would review a plan to “qualify” it as a smart plan. Need to provide a definition of “meaningfully address.”
- Will a summary of comments/survey results be published as well as the revised recommendations?
- How do cities change their plans?
 - This detail would be in administrative rules
 - There should be a process for “minor” vs. “major” changes.
- Need to bring drainage districts into the process for watershed planning.